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United for Quality Care

March 1, 2023
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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Lynda Alder and I am a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) living in New Milford. I come before you today to ask that you properly fund home care services so PCAs like me can have livable wages and quality benefits.

I have been working as a PCA for four years. I love my job because I am a natural born caregiver. Most consumers are just people who want to live their lives but struggle because of things out of their control. Knowing I can step in with guidance, direction, laughter, smiles, some sweat and sometimes some tears to enable my client to live independently and have a better quality of life is amazing. Seeing "things" we take for granted every day (like putting on our shoes) while these individuals face those challenges eagerly with a smile as they try to be as normal as possible, puts an exclamation point on how important the services we offer are to this most vulnerable population. What we do is not a privilege for vulnerable people, it is a necessity. Even though I love this work, it is challenging to work this hard for poverty wages. We asked for \$20, but were denied. Over the past couple of years we have won raises up to \$18.25, but even that has been negated by inflation. Many PCAs got into this work because we have big hearts and want to care for others, but we can barely take care of ourselves on these wages. We are literally turning into the most vulnerable population, oftentimes having to choose between food and medicine, housing and vehicle, shoes or clothes. It should not be like this! If healthcare workers are supposedly "heroes" for the work we do then why isn't the money that was earmarked for us being utilized to provide a living wage, health insurance, retirement program, disability insurance, paid sick leave and paid vacation?

With additional funding for home care services PCAs could have all of these. Health insurance would mean that my daughter, who aged out of being able to access health insurance through her father, would know she can rely on the medical treatment she needs, but we were denied that. Instead the state promised us a stipend to apply towards the purchase of health insurance, but even that has not been delivered. Additionally we weren't told until three days before the deadline that we would have to apply for it. We were similarly promised sick time, but a year later the state has not delivered on that either. We were given sick time, but no way to use it. Paid time off or sick leave means we can take days to care for ourselves without the danger of falling behind on our bills.

We are not asking for a lot! We are asking to be treated as the professional caregivers we are! It is time the state of Connecticut did what is right by PCAs and consumers we care for and properly fund home care services.

Thank you for your time.